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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001295

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KS](#)
SUBJECT: HAN MYUNG-SOOK CONFIRMED AS PRIME MINISTER

REF: SEOUL 973

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The National Assembly April 19 confirmed Han Myung-sook as Korea's new prime minister, making her the first woman to assume the nation's number two job. Han, a two-time former Cabinet minister and former dissident, told fellow lawmakers that she hoped to use her tenure to ameliorate polarization. She advocated North-South economic cooperation as a means to improve the lives, including human rights, of the North Korean people. Han expressed support for the U.S.-ROK relationship calling the United State's "our most important ally." She also expressed support for a U.S.-ROK FTA but called for the agreement to exempt rice. END SUMMARY.

HAN MYUNG-SOOK WINS CONFIRMATION

12. (SBU) Han Myung-sook, a two-time former Cabinet minister and former dissident, won the National Assembly's approval April 19 to become prime minister by a vote of 182 in favor, 77 opposed, and 3 abstentions. The vote followed two days of hearings. President Roh had nominated her March 24 to replace Lee Hae-chan.

13. (C) In different circumstance, the main opposition Grand National Party (GNP) would have mounted a ferocious attack on Han, who has a storied history as one of Korea's leading female dissidents in the pro-democracy movement of the 1970s and 80s. (As reported REFTEL, Han's personal history includes more than two years in jail for "agitating" against the Park Chung-hee regime; her husband, fellow dissident Park Seong-jun, spent 13 years behind bars for belonging to the pro-Pyongyang Revolutionary Reunification Party.) However, in the wake of sexual harassment charges against one senior GNP lawmakers and bribery charges against two others, and with an eye on the May 31 regional elections, the GNP appears to have been wary of alienating voters by too aggressively attacking Korea's first would-be woman prime minister. Thus, the GNP limited itself to a few half-hearted ad hominem accusations and a handful of questions aimed at Han's -- and by extension the Roh Administration's -- stance on North Korea-related issues, especially North-South engagement and North Korea human rights.

HAN ON NORTH KOREA

14. (SBU) Han expressed unequivocal support for the Sunshine

and Peace and Prosperity Policies, stating that the ROK should encourage the DPRK to open up its economy to foreign investment and thus contribute to improving the lives of the North Korean people. With regard to human rights, she cautioned against allowing concern over human rights abuses to stymie North-South reconciliation. Notable statements follow:

- "If North Korea is counterfeiting currency, that would constitute a violation of international law."
- "Practical help, not words, is what is needed (to address North Korean human rights). The ROKG is extending humanitarian aid through action, not words...It is important to help the North Korean people defend their right to survival. One shortcut to resolving the North Korean human rights issue is to induce North Korea to open up through economic exchange and cooperation."
- "We must be cautious about openly raising the North Korean human rights issues at a time when the two Koreas are still in confrontation, and peace and mutual trust are not yet firm enough."
- "The ROKG will pro-actively endeavor to get our abductees back. The issue of abductees and POWs will be discussed at the upcoming North-South ministerial meeting."
- "Former President Kim Dae-jung's (expected June) visit to Pyongyang will be meaningful in that it could provide an breakthrough in the stalled Six Party Talks."

HAN ON U.S.-ROK RELATIONS, FTA

15. (SBU) Han expressed support for strong U.S.-ROK relations and the bilateral FTA. However, she called for the FTA to exempt rice. Notable statements follow:

- "I believe in free democracy and market economics. I believe everything should be done in collaboration with the United States, our most important ally."
- "An FTA with the United States is inevitable. However, in view of sensitivities and vulnerabilities, rice should be excluded from the U.S.-ROK FTA negotiations. As FTA negotiations progress, I will pay greater attention to the agricultural sector, and will strive to set up policies for those sectors to be affected by the FTA. However, the while process should be viewed as part of a bigger picture and should be approached rationally. The FTA should not lead to the collapse of the public service system, including electricity, gas, railroad, and medical services."
- "Although primary and secondary education must not be included in the FTA, I think we can negotiate over college education with certain conditions attached."

COMMENT

16. (C) As Korea's first female prime minister, Han will be cognizant of her place in history. President Roh has expressed his hope that she will conduct the same scope of state affairs that he had entrusted to her predecessor, Lee Hae-chan. Han's dissident days notwithstanding, her track record as a government official suggests that she will hew closely to the Blue House line and exercise a steady hand at the helm. END COMMENT.
VERSHBOW